

REPORT

OF A

SPECIAL MEDICAL BOARD,

Assembled by desire of

THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF,

To take into consideration the

Prevalence of the purulent Ophthalmia

IN THE ARMY.

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REPORT of a SPECIAL MEDICAL BOARD, assembled by desire of the Commander in Chief, to take into consideration the PREVALENCE of the purulent OPTHALMIA in the Army,

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THE BOARD having deliberately investigated the several circumstances connected in a general manner with the Disease, and having adverted more particularly to those points which appear to have occasioned its late prevalence in the Army, begs leave to submit to the Commander in Chief the following Remarks upon it; and, for the sake of perspicuity, it is thought advisable to arrange their observations under two general heads—the means of Prevention, and the methods of Cure.

Under the first head, that of PREVENTION, the Board is of opinion,

First.—As the purulent Ophthalmia appears to be communicable principally by means of morbid matter applied to the Eyes, one of the most obvious modes by which it may be prevented from spreading, is the immediate separation of those who have caught the disorder, from the rest of their comrades and associates. As soon, therefore, as the disorder is discovered to exist in a Regiment, the Board is of opinion that the Surgeon, or his Assistant, should daily inspect the Eyes of all the Soldiers ; and if there be the smallest appearance of inflammation in any of them, these should be immediately removed from the rest, and be sent to the Hospital, or Dépôt ; in order, not merely that the disease may be prevented from being communicated to others, but that proper remedies may be employed, in the most expeditious manner, to arrest its progress in the persons who suffer under it.

Secondly—Cleanliness, as a means of prevention, is of such high importance, that it cannot be urged too forcibly. In this part of the Report, the Board is of opinion that it cannot object in too strong terms to a practice which has been very commonly pursued in the Army, and in many other confined situations—that of permitting a number of persons to wash their faces in succession, not only in the same tub or bason, but with the same water. This practice should be peremptorily prohibited in all His Majesty's Regiments, particularly in those where the purulent Ophthalmia has prevailed ; and instead of it, the men should be obliged to wash their faces in a running stream, either from a pump or a closed cistern, under which there is not any receptacle for the waste water ;—and instead of wiping the face with a towel, common to many, each man should be supplied

with one for his own use;—and he should be strictly prohibited from lending or borrowing any article of this kind. For greater security in this respect, the Board recommends, that those men who suffer under the Ophthalmia, may be provided with a towel, having a distinguishing mark, such as a coloured border. These marked towels should be kept separate from the rest, and should not be washed by the common washerwoman, but by a person appointed for this special purpose.

Thirdly—The bedding and clothes of those who have the purulent Ophthalmia, are liable to be so much imbued with the discharge that issues from the Eyes, as to become a possible cause of communicating the disorder to others. The Board recommends that these be frequently washed and scoured; and as the bolsters and sheets are particularly liable to be thus imbued, the bolsters should be covered with linen cases; and these, as well as the sheets, be frequently and thoroughly washed and cleansed. If this work be properly performed, it does not appear to the Board that these articles need be destroyed.—This remark may be applied also to the towels, and to most other things of a similar kind, that are employed by the nurses and patients. Sponges, from their porous texture, furnish an exception to the above rule; these it may be better to destroy than to return into Store.

Fourthly—The Board does not presume to offer any opinion on the choice of Depôts for persons who suffer under this disorder, though the subject has been brought before it by a Member of the Army Medical Board. This Board has not sufficient local information to guide its judgment on the subject; and as it seems intimately connected with general military arrangements, the Board leaves it to the consideration of more competent Military Authorities.

Under the second Head, which relates to the **METHODS** of **CURE**, the Board observes, that it is impossible to offer directions that can be applied to all cases of this disorder. The purulent Ophthalmia prevails at different times, and in different places, with very different degrees of malignity; and even in the same place, and at the same time, some persons suffer under the most violent symptoms of the disorder, whilst others have it in a comparatively mild form. This variety does not depend on any known difference in the constitution of the patients; some, who were weakened by previous indisposition, having had both the inflammation and the purulence more severely than others, who, previous to the attack of this disorder, were in high health and strength. Without directing the practice therefore in each individual case, the Board presents the following observations on a few of the principal remedies that are likely to be required.

First—On the necessity of taking away blood.—When this disorder attacks persons who are strong and plethoric, there cannot be any doubt relative to the propriety of taking away a large quantity of blood; and this in general will be done most speedily, and most effectually, by making a large orifice in a vein in one or both of the arms.—When the disorder attacks those who are weakly and debilitated by former illness, if the inflammation be accompanied with a great tumefaction of the conjunctiva, and a profuse purulent discharge, together with much pain both in the head and eyes, the necessity of taking away blood appears, also, to be so strong, that the Board does not think it can be postponed, without imminent danger to the patient's sight; but the quantity to be taken away need not be so great in this as in the former instance; and perhaps the bleeding may be performed most advantageously, either by opening the temporal artery, by cupping

on the temples or nape of the neck, or by applying six or more leeches on the temples or forehead.—Sometimes after taking away blood from the arm, it becomes necessary to repeat the operation more than once, and, occasionally, to apply leeches many times in succession. In some instances it has also been thought useful to scarify that part of the conjunctiva that lines the inside of the eyelids ; but this operation should be performed with a very sharp lancet ; and it seems more advisable in the subsequent stages of the disorder, than at the time the inflammation is in the height of its violence.

Secondly—When the purulent Ophthalmia pursues its course in the most malignant manner, it usually terminates in a rupture of the cornea ; and this accident too often involves the pupil, and much injures, if it does not destroy, vision. The Board is therefore of opinion, that as soon as the symptoms justify an apprehension of this event, a puncture should be made on the side of the cornea, in order to discharge the aqueous humour. This puncture may be made by a careful person, without any danger, either with a spear-pointed lancet, with the knife used to puncture the cornea in the operation of extracting the cataract, or with an instrument which resembles a common couching needle, but is somewhat larger, and has a groove passing through it longitudinally, through which the aqueous humour escapes as soon as the point of the instrument has penetrated into the anterior chamber. Whichever of these instruments be employed, it should be introduced parallel to the plane of the iris, that it may not wound this membrane ; and it should be withdrawn as soon as the aqueous humour has been discharged.—Sometimes in the purulent Ophthalmia, matter is rapidly formed in the aqueous humour behind the cornea ; and in such a case the operation of discharging it becomes indispensable ; but for this purpose the knife used to divide the cornea in ex-

tracting the cataract, is more proper than either of the other two that have been mentioned.

Thirdly—Blisters may be applied with advantage in almost every stage of the disorder; but the Board is of opinion, that during the violent state of the Inflammation, they will be more beneficial between the shoulders than nearer to the eyes. Issues made behind the ears by means of caustic, may also be useful in the subsequent stages of the disorder.

Fourthly—During the time that a thick purulent matter issues profusely from the surface of the inflamed and tumefied conjunctiva, it should be washed away once, at least, in every hour. This will be most effectually performed by injecting a medicated liquor between the eye and the eyelids, by means of a blunt-pointed syringe: The liquor should be propelled with sufficient force to bring away the matter, but without suffering the end of the instrument to touch the eye, and without making any pressure on the globe itself, either with the syringe or the finger. A solution of the Sulphas Cupri, (such as the mixture of one part of the lotion commonly denominated Bates's Camphorated Vitriolic Lotion, and six or eight parts of water,) a solution of the Cuprum Ammoniatum, (formerly called Aqua Sapphirina,) and the Liquor Plumbi Acetati dilutus, may be classed among the best applications in this state of the disorder. It is only necessary to give a caution against using these or any other applications in such a degree of strength as to pain the eye during the active state of the inflammation. In general it is believed, it will be most useful to apply these lotions cold; but if the coldness be particularly ungrateful to the feelings of the patient, (which is a rare occurrence, except in severely cold weather,) they may be applied warm.—Sometimes, and especially when there is considerable pain in

the eye, advantage has been derived from holding the eye, between the times of applying the lotion, over the vapour of hot water,—or from fomenting the eye by means of a sponge, or fine flannel, either with a hot decoction of poppy heads, or with a mixture of one part of vinegar, and ten or twelve of hot water.

Fifthly.—The Board is of opinion, that the bowels should be kept in a laxative state during the violence of the inflammation, and saline purgatives appear to them preferable to those that are more stimulating.

Sixthly.—In the early stage of the purulent Ophthalmia, the use of alterative medicines seems wholly precluded. In its subsequent progress, various kinds of alteratives, and also of tonics, may become useful, according to the peculiar constitutions of the patients; but the selection of these must be left to the discretion of the medical men who prescribe them.

Seventhly.—A total abstinence from animal food and fermented liquors, and a very low diet in every respect, are absolutely required, so long as the violence of the Inflammation continues. A more nutritious diet may be afterwards allowed; but the change should be made with great caution, and the indulgence be immediately prohibited, if it appear to occasion any increase of the inflammation.

Eighthly.—It does not appear that injury has been derived from the access of cold air, in cases of the purulent Ophthalmia, when patients have not been exposed to partial currents of it. But manifest harm has been done by keeping them in hot rooms, and confining them long in their beds.

Ninthly.—As instances have occurred of the Ophthalmic

having been produced by the application of acrid substances to the eyes, it may be proper to remark, that neither the tumefaction of the tunica conjunctiva, nor the quantity of matter secreted by this membrane, are so considerable, when the disorder is produced in this way, as they are when it is occasioned by the contact of purulent matter.

By desire of the Board,

(Signed)

L. PEPYS, President.

S. REED, Secretary.

London, 5th Feb. 1810.

